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Wherein a new writer straightforwardly argues that those traditional New England attributes of thrift, stern integrity and strict adherence to the strict letter of a bargain are not restricted to this planet, or even to this system.

Yankee Exodus

by RUTH M. GOLDSMITH

JOSHUA PERKINS KNOCKED out his pipe against the side of the porch steps and squinted at the noon sun. "Shouldn't wonder but what it's time you was heading back," he said, getting up and stretching his tall, spare frame. Joshua's companion — Adam, as he called him — rose, too, but forgot to readjust his gravity control and with his first step sailed into the air and banged against the porch roof.

"Better hold her, or she'll head for the barn," Joshua said, watching Adam climb down one of the porch posts.

"Plumb forgot," Adam acknowledged. Together they started down the hill in back of the house. "Wouldn't change your mind?" Adam asked. "Could take you up, say, 500 miles. Sight to see. Wouldn't take long."

Joshua shook his head. "Ain't one to go somewheres just to be going. Chores to do."

Adam nodded. "A rolling stone gathers no moss," he said, and shot into the air again — this time with purpose. When he climbed down from the top of the tree he had a squirrel in one hand, a branch of oak in another, and a bunch of acorns in another.

"Got your hands full," Joshua said, with remarkable restraint, considering it was his natural inclination to point out that his property rights were being violated. He made the best of the situation by trading the items for information. "Don't recollect, offhand," he said, "whether you see things like that where you come from."

"Not the likes of these," Adam admitted.

They had reached the flat field where Adam's silvery space ship rested, its round rim hugging the ground. Adam loaded his cargo and prepared for take-off, while Joshua busied himself by checking the structure of the stone wall that edged the field. There were still things he was curious to know

about the ship, but he hadn't lived 62 years on a New England farm, and his fathers before him, without learning how to temper curiosity with caution. He was salting away more knowledge with each of Adam's visits, and patience was golden.

The disk kicked like a mule and shot up, almost out of sight. It dropped down just as fast, hung motionless some 50 feet above Joshua. Then its rim wobbled as an airplane dips its wings in salute. Adam appeared at a port and waved two hands. Joshua waved back.

The disk climbed again, slowly. It was over the house when a flashing thing dropped from it. The thing hit the ridge of the ell with a great splintering sound and smashed through the roof.

The disk hesitated, then continued to rise.

Joshua didn't hurry his stride. By the time he got to the house he had it clear in his mind that this had been an accident, that Adam had no cause to bear grudge against him, and therefore hadn't dropped the thing on purpose.

He examined the damaged ell carefully. Then he brought out the old sea chest, unlocked it, took out the insurance papers and examined them. What he was looking for was there, as clear as anything, even if it was in the fine print. He called his insurance agent, Tom Peabody, on the phone.

"Why hello there, Josh," Peabody's voice came heartily over the wire.

"My house has been damaged," Joshua said, "like it says here in the policy, by an object falling from an aircraft."

"Sorry to hear that," Peabody said sympathetically. "One moment while I get your file. Let's see — Fire, Lightning, and Extended Coverage . . . Much damage, Josh?"

"I figure it at \$1296.34. Though it's likely to be more if there's any delay attending to it. A stitch in time saves nine."

"Well, you'll hear from our adjuster, and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to call."

"Ay-yah." Joshua hung up, put away the insurance policy, and reckoned his time. There were chores to do first, and he did them, feeling more chipper than he had since the days of his boundary dispute with Sam Thorpe. He had a fair and square claim against the insurance company; he had a piece of Adam's space ship to study; and he had reported the damage at \$1296.34, which gave him a safe enough margin in case he'd made a mistake in figuring or overlooked anything, since he actually calculated the damage at \$962.57.

He was chopping wood the next morning when the adjuster's investigator, Leonard Brown, arrived. They walked toward the damaged ell. "What kind of plane was it?" he asked.

"Wasn't exactly a plane — like you'd call airplane," — Joshua said. "More of an *aircraft*, like it says in the policy."

"Well, just give me the best description of the thing that you can," Brown said, thinking of jets.

"You might say," Joshua paused to rest the ax against the side of the house, "that it was a circular kind of aircraft, driven by some system Almighty Providence hasn't seen fit to acquaint us with yet."

Brown kept his head. "Are you saying it was what the newspapers call a flying saucer?"

"I'm saying what I seen."

"You know the official opinion of such reports, don't you?"

"That federal government —" Joshua began direly, for his opposition to meddling by that body was as deep-rooted as his thrift.

"What I mean," Brown interrupted, raising his voice, "is that my company has to abide by what's official. Now if there was an airplane flying over . . . Look here, do you have the thing that fell?"

"Ay-yah," Joshua pointed. The thing was lying under an applewood highboy. It was silvery and cylinder-shaped. Brown picked it up. "I'll take it along," he said, placing it outside the door on the grass. "If it's a standard airplane part and if a plane was going over at the time, we'll know where we stand."

"If ifs and ands were pots and pans, there'd be no need for tinkers' hands."

"Well, I'll take your statement. You'll have to sign it."

"I've got my statement, signed and notarized," Joshua said, following him out the door.

Brown turned to look at Joshua, and his foot brushed the cylinder. It began to tip. It fell over and rolled. While the two stood and watched, it rolled until it touched the ax leaning against the side of the house. Then there was the noise, like water thrown on a hot stove, and a little puff of silvery stuff.

Then there was nothing, except the ax-handle, leaning at a new angle against the side of the house.

"Appears like it don't like metal," Joshua finally said. "Though it don't mind wood. Or people."

"That was important evidence." Brown's hands were trembling. "Well . . . you'll hear from us, Mr. Perkins."

"Ay-yah."

Joshua was not downhearted about the turn things had taken; in fact, he was downright cheerful. Knowing that foresight was better than hindsight, he had, the previous afternoon, brought his grandnephew over from Miller's Falls — the one who had the flash camera and could use it well enough to sell pictures to the newspaper every now and then. The boy had taken some

fine pictures of the object and the damage it did, and if it came down to it, he was sure the boy could take some equally fine pictures of Adam's ship.

Besides that, he'd brought out other witnesses — including an elder of the church, a selectman, and an auto mechanic who was an Air Force veteran — to view the damage and the object. He had their notarized statements telling what they had seen.

He was ready to take his case to the Supreme Court, if need be, and on the strength of it he hired a carpenter to come and fix the house.

A couple of days later, at twilight, Adam came. As he opened the front door, Joshua could see this ship was much bigger than the one Adam usually piloted. Bet it takes more'n one fellow to run that, Joshua thought, but Adam was alone on the porch. "Come to repair the damage," he said.

"Reckon I owe you an apology, too. Plain carelessness."

"I thank you for your kindness," Joshua said. "Now, if I didn't have this insurance, I'd accept your offer." He explained about the policy. "It's bought and paid for. The company is obligated."

"Maybe there's something else we could build then," Adam said. "Make up for the trouble you've been put to."

It could be said that Joshua was of a mind to decline. He didn't want more than was his due. On the other hand, he had had the thought in mind lately of building another henhouse. He was silently recalculating possible profit on 500 pullets, with no cost for their housing, when Adam urged, "Speak up, speak up."

"Reckon it wouldn't hurt to have another henhouse on the place."

Adam led the way to a group of figures standing by stacks of metallic-looking stuff they'd unloaded from the disk. "Reckon you don't know these folks," he said.

"Pleased to meet you," Joshua said, shuffling his feet a little.

"Pleased to meet you," the crew chorused, shuffling their feet a little.

The new structure was soon complete.

"You missed your calling," Joshua said admiringly. "That's a first-rate henhouse." He examined it from all sides. The building was true, with not a sign of poor workmanship anywhere, but it didn't look like anything he'd ever seen before and he couldn't rightly say what it was made of.

He stepped inside, and there was the most mysterious thing of all. It was sound, deep sound, softened as distant roaring, coming and going and coming again. It called something to mind — the conch shell he'd brought back from the seashore some 40 years before.

He brought the shell out from the parlor, handed it to Adam, and showed him how to listen to it.

“Well, I never,” Adam said. “Who would have thought.”

Joshua had not seen the little cuss so wonder-struck since that day he had first come across the strange aircraft in his field and found Adam standing on the ground outside, admiring the boulders.

The two of them had stared at each other a long time. Naturally, Joshua was curious but he figured he'd let the trespasser speak first. Finally, Adam opened his mouth — it was more or less the same as Joshua's, except it seemed to have more teeth — and spoke in good English, as clear as anything. (Later, when they got to know each other real well, he explained his quick learning as “immediate telepathic comprehension” or some such.)

He said he greatly admired the boulders and Joshua assured him that he wouldn't find tougher granite anywhere, if that was what he was looking for. Just as a feeler, he proposed that Adam could have half the rocks in the field if he would build the other half into a new stone wall. Adam quickly agreed, which left Joshua feeling cheated.

Not that he had any complaint about having another field cleared and a new wall built, in return for rocks that he had no use for, nor had he any complaint against the ways of the Lord, who made all creatures. It was just that Adam's quick agreement had cost him the chance — by a little horse-trading — to take the stranger's measure.

Still and all, he'd found out that Adam was a reliable little cuss, and a determined one, because he kept returning to fulfill his part of the agreement even after he'd learned how much of the rock was hidden under the surface of the ground, and how hard it was to budge.

Later still, he'd found out that Adam didn't really need the rock, though they didn't have it where he came from, and that Adam's extra-sharp eyes, which had been able to detect its wonder from the sky in the first place, could see things in the crystalline rock that he, Joshua, could not see and that Adam seemed at a loss for words to tell about.

Now there was the same strange pleasure with the conch shell. Adam took it to each of his friends and showed them how to hear it. They were delighted, too.

Joshua hated to part with the shell, but he was beginning to feel a little uneasy about getting the henhouse at no cost. He didn't want to be beholden to anyone. “You take it,” he brought himself to say to Adam. A conch shell for a henhouse. It was a fair enough trade.

He installed 500 pullet chicks in the henhouse and soon noticed with satisfaction that they were growing uncommonly fast.

His satisfaction reached its peak when the adjuster, George Whitcomb, visited him. He was gripping Leonard Brown's report and Joshua's sworn

statement and his face was flushed with anger. "You expect me to swallow this cock-and-bull?" he asked, slapping the reports.

Joshua said nothing.

"You must be suffering from hallucinations, or hysteria, or— or . . ."

"Layers of hot air," Joshua suggested gravely.

Whitcomb's face grew redder. "You'll change your mind if you expect to collect anything," he said, getting back in the car.

"I doubt that damnly," Joshua said.

But news of the henhouse got out and around, and neighbors dropped in on Joshua, asking fool questions and wasting his time. "Well I never," they said when they saw the building. "Come by mail, did it?"

"You might say," Joshua said, "that it came by air express."

"Cost a good deal?" they asked.

"It's paid for," Joshua said.

Worst of all, they said, "You must have struck it rich," and generations of gains hard-won and thriftily held against those less provident or less conscientious made Joshua's reproving reply almost instinctive. "I wouldn't say that," he said.

Even so, there were those with brass enough to ask for a loan.

The crowds grew larger every day.

Neighbors were neighbors, like it or not, but people with out-of-state license plates on their cars were another matter. The thought came to Joshua that the federal government would be sticking its nose in next, and he knew it was time to take a stand. He checked his fences, made sure his KEEP OUT, PRIVATE PROPERTY signs were in plain sight, and barred the gate.

Adam came again, at twilight, in a small disk and alone. They sat on the porch, watching night draw in.

"Hope the henhouse ain't more trouble than it's worth," Adam finally said.

"Wouldn't say that exactly . . . nothing wrong with the henhouse. Trouble is with people. Buzzing around like flies."

"All-fired nuisance," Adam nodded.

"Getting so a body can't call his soul his own. — Course there's been times when there was plenty of folks on this farm, but they was all in the family."

"Ay-yah."

"My grandfather was one of a big family," Joshua began. Calling the roll of his relatives and forebears came easily to him, and he told of those who had stayed to work the farm and those who had moved out to settle places of their own; he recalled those who had been taken young, and those who had lived to go, hale and hearty; he told of those who had headed west

and those who had gone to sea. It was a long speech but it was not without purpose. "Though I suppose," he finished, "such journeys sound like small potatoes, compared to yours, in that airship."

". . . Wouldn't say that exactly." Adam seemed thoughtful. "You're welcome to try our land," he finally said. "Though it would seem strange, there's no gainsaying it."

"Don't rightly know whether I should," Joshua answered. "But I'll give it some thought."

He stayed up late that night, trying to decide what was right. In a way he wanted to go, to be free of the world that had closed in around him, but his freedom wouldn't be worth a tinker's damn if he lost his self-respect in going. There was the damage to the ell — he'd committed himself to recover that and couldn't just leave it go. But that was small compared to the claim the past held on him.

He thought of the stone-walled fields that spread around him, of the ever-green slopes of the hills. The roots of the family had been in this land for nearly 300 years, no matter where the branches spread. He had to decide about the place — and about himself. He could stick here and stand the people off, or sell out. He thought of the way family land had been held onto in the past, through good years and bad, by names that were as familiar to his mind as winter wind around the house — Prudence and Ezra, Constance and Asher, Thankful and Timothy. . . . No matter how much he longed for space, his conscience would trouble him forever after if he high-tailed off and left all trace of family land in the hands of outsiders.

He thought of the brook, and of white birches. He thought of johnny-cake and dried beef gravy, of succotash and fried apple pies. He wondered at a land that lacked rocks and snow, huckleberry bushes and squirrels, cider vinegar. He thought of long life and sudden death. He brought out the old sea chest, took the papers out of it, and studied them one by one.

He made up his mind.

After the first round of chores the next morning, he took his stand by the gate with a shotgun, and warned off those who thought of trespassing.

Tom Peabody soon drove up and Joshua let him through the gate. "I've come to appeal to your civic pride," he said. "I know how you feel about your rights, Josh, but it won't help the name of this town any if people get shot at out here."

Joshua fired a blast in the direction of a group of people starting over the fence down the line. "All gall, no grit," he muttered as they dropped back down.

George Whitcomb drove up and had to stay in the road. "Why don't

you handle this thing the way it should be handled or sell out?" he shouted.

"How's my claim?" Joshua called back.

"In the waste basket. If I did anything else with it I'd be the laughing-stock."

"Got your lawyers ready or you going to argue the case yourself?"

"You take it to court and you'll be the laughingstock."

"We'll see."

Whitcomb took two cautious steps closer to the gate and his tone turned conciliatory. "How much are you asking for your place, Mr. Perkins?"

"I ain't asking."

"Ah . . . ," Whitcomb cleared his throat. "I'll give you \$18,000, just to see that this thing is handled properly."

Joshua snorted.

Whitcomb's mouth tightened, Peabody grinned and Whitcomb offered \$19,000. Joshua grunted. Whitcomb raised his price steadily, grimly. Now and then Peabody chipped in with his two cents worth, but both of them might as well have been yelling down rain barrels. Joshua kept blazing away at would-be trespassers. When any fool asked about the price of admission, he just jerked a thumb at the KEEP OUT sign and then waved the shotgun in their general direction. Nobody asked the question twice.

Joshua paused suddenly as he was about to reload. "Not likely to sell a place that's been in the family so long," he said. "Though I suppose that house would make a fine hotel. Especially with a drawing card like that henhouse . . . shouldn't wonder but that's what the stranger had in mind, that one that came around offering to buy."

"What did he offer?" Whitcomb asked hoarsely.

"As I recollect, it was \$23,000 . . . but he wanted the herd," Joshua added.

"I'll meet his price and you keep the damned cows."

Joshua shook his head.

"You're a stubborn son of —"

Joshua swung around.

"The soil," Whitcomb finished.

"Stubborn is my middle name," Joshua said. "I don't intend to let go my claim for damage to the ell."

Whitcomb raised his offer to \$24,296.34. Peabody stared. Joshua scratched his chin, looked interested for a minute, then shook his head. "If I was to sell, I'd have to keep those new pullets."

"Nothing doing. Those chickens have to go with the place."

"Well, I wasn't thinking of selling anyway."

"Might be wise to start off with a fresh batch of chicks," Tom suggested.

"Would you agree," Whitcomb shouted, pounding on the gate with each stipulation, "not to use those hens as a competitive attraction, nor divulge the secret of how to construct such a building, nor make use of the knowledge yourself to construct a building to compete with this one?"

"Damage my gate and you'll pay for it," Joshua said.

"Would you agree?"

"Mmmn . . . well . . . ay-ah."

The deal was made.

"I think you've done right," Peabody sighed, "but it must go hard, Josh, to leave the old place."

"No use crying over spilt milk," Joshua said.

He had the whole business straight with his conscience. It was all right to give up on the insurance claim, because he was positive he could have won the case in court. And he had properly settled his score with the man who had blocked his claim. So those matters were all right.

But the biggest task of stilling his conscience lay ahead. Joshua Perkins wasn't going off to some far-off country without leaving some Perkins-owned land behind him. In getting that land, he knew he would meet his match when it came to bargaining with Sam Thorpe. But it had to be done.

Joshua had several talks with Sam while the final papers were being drawn.

He took a few trips to the city and also had a visit from Adam.

And he did have a bad time with Sam Thorpe. Sam recollected (just as Joshua had recollected) that the section under discussion had once been part of the Perkins place. He made doubly certain by demanding to see specific old papers in the sea chest. Then — worse yet — he remembered there'd been some misunderstanding when the Perkinses had sold the land to the Thorpes. It seemed that the Thorpes had thought at the time they were buying an entirely different section . . . one that wasn't so rocky.

So Sam named a price that was beyond all reason.

Joshua didn't let on how mad he was. The important thing was to keep square with his conscience. So he mentioned his herd of cows, which he knew Sam coveted, and they finally came to terms. Even so, Joshua put more cash money on the barrel-head than he cared to think about.

Joshua stood on the hill in the early morning, watching the lightening sky. Whatever the cost, this land that stretched around him could be called family land as much as the other and the deed to it was in the sea chest at his feet. He had done his duty to the past.

The disk — the big one — swung into sight, landed, and Adam and the crew tumbled out. "Reckon these should go in first," Joshua shouted, indicating the crates of squawking pullets.

They loaded the chickens into the passenger compartments, where they instantly quieted down, and then loaded the boxes of johnnycake meal in after them. With johnnycake and eggs Joshua could keep fit until he was accustomed to the new land.

But the most precious cargo went into the hold. Crate after crate of the conch shells he'd bought in the city were loaded into its vast interior. Those were his stock in trade, as good as gold. . . .

The disk shot into the sky, then came down to salute the old Perkins place. From the porthole Joshua could see George Whitcomb standing on the step of his newly-purchased house, staring up at them. Joshua waved farewell. Then, on the inner rim of the disk, he spied a row of cylinders similar to the one that had fallen on the ell.

As he watched, one of them disengaged. It flashed in the sun, and Joshua felt sure, even before it happened, that the cylinder would hit the henhouse. There was a silvery puff below, and the henhouse was gone.

The ship hesitated, then continued to rise.